

## CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A food packaging film for use in creating and stabilizing a desirable color on a viewable surface of a raw myoglobin-containing food product without deleteriously affecting the subsurface color of the food product, the film comprising:~~a)~~—a food contact layer capable of contacting the food product held within a package formed with the film; wherein the film is a barrier to oxygen, wherein the film comprises ~~and b)~~—an effective amount of a nitrogen oxide -containing compound applied to the food contact layer, wherein the effective amount of the nitrogen oxide-containing compound is ~~and~~ capable of interacting with the myoglobin-containing food product to produce the desirable color, and wherein the effective amount of the nitrogen oxide-containing compound is insufficient to effectively cure the entire myoglobin-containing food product.
2. (canceled)
3. (original) The packaging film of claim 1 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound forms nitric oxide when contacted with the food product.
4. (original) The packaging film of claim 3 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is a nitrite.
5. (original) The packaging film of claim 4 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is a sodium nitrite.
6. (canceled)
7. (currently amended) The packaging film of ~~claim 6~~ claim 1 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is applied to a surface of the food contact layer.
8. (currently amended) The packaging film of ~~claim 6~~ claim 1 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is incorporated into the food contact layer.
9. (original) The packaging film of claim 1 further comprising at least one additional layer positioned on the food contact layer.
10. (currently amended) The packaging film of claim 9 wherein the ~~food contact~~ at least one additional layer is an adhesive.
11. (currently amended) The packaging film of claim 10 wherein the ~~at least one additional film layer is disposed on the food contact layer~~ adhesive comprises the nitrogen oxide-containing compound.

12. (original) The food packaging film of claim 1 wherein the film is adapted to vacuum package the food item.
13. (currently amended) A food packaging container comprising:
- a) a tray adapted to hold a food item therein; and
  - b) a film positioned over the tray to maintain the food item therein, the film including an effective amount of a ~~nitrogen-containing~~ nitrogen oxide-containing compound and adapted to be in contact with the food item held within the tray;
- wherein the tray is a barrier to oxygen, wherein the film is a barrier to oxygen, wherein the effective amount of the nitrogen oxide-containing compound is capable of creating and stabilizing a desirable color on a viewable surface of the food item, and wherein the effective amount of the nitrogen oxide-containing compound is insufficient to effectively cure the entire food item.
14. (original) The food packaging container of claim 13, wherein the film is used to vacuum package the food item in the tray and substantially eliminate the presence of oxygen between the film and the tray.
15. (currently amended) The food packaging container of claim 13 wherein the ~~nitrogen-containing-tray comprises the nitrogen oxide-containing compound is applied to the tray.~~
16. (currently amended) A method of packaging a food item to ~~prolong a desirable appearance for create and stabilize a desirable color on a viewable surface of~~ the food item, the method comprising the steps of:
- a) providing a film including an oxide of nitrogen; and
  - b) contacting the film with the food item to form a package for the food item;
- wherein the film is a barrier to oxygen and wherein the oxide of nitrogen is in an amount that is insufficient to effectively cure the entire food item.
17. (original) The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of evacuating oxygen from between the film and the food item after contacting the film with the food item.
18. (currently amended) The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of introducing other non-oxygen gases or mixture of non-oxygen gases between the film and the food item after evacuating the oxygen.
19. (canceled)

20. (currently amended) The method of ~~claim 19~~ claim 16 wherein the step of ~~applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film providing a film including an oxide of nitrogen~~ comprises permeating the film with the oxide of nitrogen.
21. (canceled)
22. (currently amended) The method of ~~claim 19~~ claim 16 wherein the step of ~~applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film providing a film including an oxide of nitrogen~~ comprises applying the oxide of nitrogen to a contact surface of the film which contacts the food item.
23. (original) The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of evacuating oxygen from between the film and the food item prior to contacting the film with the food item.
24. (original) The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of treating the food item with the oxide of nitrogen prior to contacting the film with the food item.
25. (canceled)
26. (currently amended) A method for creating and stabilizing a desirable color in a food product, the method comprising the step of contacting a viewable surface of the food product with an effective amount of a ~~nitrogen-containing-nitrogen oxide-containing~~ compound, wherein the step of contacting the viewable surface comprises releasing the ~~nitrogen-containing-nitrogen oxide-containing~~ compound into contact with the food product in a controlled manner and in an amount insufficient to effectively cure the entire food product, and wherein oxygen is barred from the food product.
27. (currently amended) A vacuum packaged meat comprising an uncooked meat product vacuum packaged in a multilayer polymeric film having a first oxygen barrier polymeric layer and a second surface layer containing an oxide of nitrogen, selected from the group consisting of sodium nitrite, sodium nitrate, potassium nitrite, potassium nitrate and blends thereof, in an effective amount, wherein the effective amount is sufficient to transfer between at least 0.0008 and 0.046-milligram per square inch to the uncooked meat product within 96 hours but is insufficient to effectively cure the entire uncooked meat product.